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## THE SECOND YEAR OF A MODERN LANGUAGE<sup>1</sup>

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When our honored President, Professor Barnes, wrote me, a month or so ago, inviting me to speak to you about the work of the second year in the modern languages, I was not sure that my official position as state inspector might not make it inadvisable for me to discuss the work which I am called upon to supervise, especially since we are now in a period of transition and change from the old translation method to at least a modified form of the direct method. I finally decided to accept the kind invitation of your president in the spirit in which it was tendered, but I beg leave to imitate Maître Jacques of the *Avare*, who was, you remember, now *cocher*, now *cuisinier*. I should like to lay aside my character of coachman of the state modern-language coach, and assume the character of cook, or chef, though with no aspirations for the *cordon bleu*, and try to serve up to you a second-year course, fairly complete from the *hors-d'œuvres* to the *café noir*!

Perhaps I ought to say a few words to you about the first year's work, not because this subject was not adequately treated by Mr. Host at your last meeting, but merely to recall to your minds the main features of that excellent discussion by my esteemed colleague. You will remember that Mr. Host stressed heavily (1) drill in pronunciation and practice in oral reading, and (2) the acquisition of a rather large vocabulary of the most common words and phrases, together with an accurate and ready knowledge of the main facts of the grammar, i.e., declensions, conjugations, and applied syntax. For this purpose the ordinary grammar or lesson-book, in conjunction with an easy reader, serves admirably. There should be no attempt to imitate the European reformers, with their pre-grammatical stage, where no grammar is taught, nor yet in their inductive, or rather pseudo-inductive teaching of the

<sup>1</sup>Address delivered before the Eastern Section of the New York State Modern Language Association, Union College, Schenectady, New York, April 27, 1912.

grammar. That sort of thing is all well enough in German and French schools, where conditions make it advisable and insure its successful operation; it is, however, quite out of place in our short courses and under our peculiar conditions. What we want is a time-saver, and not a time-waster; and of all the spendthrifts the so-called inductive method is the worst. Where it can and should be used is in the second and third year, rather than in the first, after the fundamentals have been mastered; for the use of the inductive method is, strictly speaking, the province of the scholar rather than of the learner. What we wish, in our first-year course, is the speediest and most solid preparation for the reading of French and German; and for that, pronunciation, knowledge of forms, a fair vocabulary, and some notion of syntax are quite necessary. Where the great majority of our pupils take but two years of a modern language it seems to me little short of criminal to dawdle over the work in a pre-grammatical, propaedeutical, or pseudo-inductive course.

The first thing that I should do with a class that came to me in second-year German or French would be, if I had not taught the pupils in the first year, to find out what they are and what they know by giving a series of oral and written reviews, for a week or ten days, on the work of the first year. That would enable me to kill two or three birds with one stone. It would call fresh to the minds of the pupils the work of the first year; it would enable me to get a line on the pupils' character, mental and moral; it would adequately test the previous work of the pupils, and the teachers from whom they came. I should then know my pupils, and there can be no really good teaching without this preliminary knowledge. I should thereafter know what pupils I could teach *en masse*, as a class, and what pupils I should have to teach individually, both in class and after school-hours. Teachers should remember that it is as much their business in a democratic school system to minister to the needs of the one-hundredth sheep and the one-hundredth goat, and according to their individual needs, as it is to the ninety-and-nine good sheep; and it is quite as well to consider the number of the last-mentioned members of the school flock as very greatly exaggerated in the parable.

Before beginning the work of the second year I should put squarely before me, in writing, if necessary, just what aim or aims I wished to attain for my pupils in scholarship and habit-formation and the best means of attaining this aim or these aims. Then, and then only, should I be in a position to judge my own work—to look upon it impersonally and call it good or bad. Yet it is surprising how few teachers do that. Most of them teach by pages, seeing only the limited day's work with the rays of a dark-lantern in the circumambient Egyptian blackness.

In the first place, the aim must be a good and worthy one, i.e., it must have an educational value, and a permanent educational value, and not merely an informational value. I do not consider that it is our business as teachers of modern languages to prepare boys to be waiters in cosmopolitan hotels and restaurants or interpreters in cosmopolitan police courts. Nor should we make it our business to teach them the trivial and superficial facts of the tourist's observation—that German men drink beer and smoke prodigiously, and that German women drink altogether too much coffee; that the Germans eat five times a day, or that butter does not appear on the table for dinner, etc., *ad nauseam*. At least one German reader contains about two hundred pages of just such insipid stuff. I have no patience with such hand-made products of the American tourist; at least not for use in the classroom. If *Realien* are to form a part of the instruction, let them be in the form of maps, pictures, anecdotes, etc., introduced at the proper psychological moment by the teacher. What I wish to put into the hands of my pupils is, not a guidebook or a tourist's book of anecdotes, but real literature; something, emanating from the imagination of a German or French author, to appeal to the imagination of my pupils. Do not misunderstand me: I do not mean the severe classical literature of the Lessing-Goethe-Schiller type, at this stage of the pupil's progress, but the simpler forms of literature. All that I ask is that they be simple, interesting, imaginative, and worth while in content. With this as my material I should aim to have my pupils read a lot, read intelligently and appreciatively, and acquire, through reading, the habit and the love of reading.

In the second place, no aim is practical unless it is practicable.

I don't care how worthy and how ideally commendable your aim may be, if you cannot ordinarily attain it, you should discard it. How often I have listened with an almost vicious impatience to would-be reformers proclaiming as the aim of modern-language teaching "a speaking knowledge" of the language, and basing their argument upon their own experience when they went to Germany or France. As though more than one in five thousand of our pupils would ever see France or Germany! Again I must request that you do not misunderstand me: I am not arguing against oral work, not in the least. On the contrary, I am very much in favor of it; it is indispensable, psychologically and pedagogically, in right teaching. But that is vastly different from taking as the aim of our instruction "a speaking knowledge" of the language, and I make bold to say that if you fail to look upon this matter rightly your whole instruction will soon be vitiated. Keep the worthy and really attainable "reading knowledge" as the aim of your instruction, with a full realization of the psychological and pedagogical reasons for the oral work as an aid to the attainment of that aim, always in mind, and your method will follow as the night follows day. Speaking the language, hearing it spoken, explaining the text in the foreign tongue, etc., not only aid the memory very greatly by providing an extra vantage-point of association, but they alone give *Sprachgefühl* and make possible a higher and more delicate appreciation of the literature. I should advise, therefore, very strongly that the foreign language be, in the second year, the language of the classroom, not only for all the various activities of the teacher, such as the assignment of the lessons, commendation and criticism of work, commands, etc., but also for the interpretation of the text read.

I must confess that the trend of modern-language teaching in some quarters of the state would seem to indicate that translation was about to be abolished. In two teachers' meetings of the last six months I have heard it advocated that texts with vocabularies should go, and that dictionaries in one language be substituted. I think that it is a mistaken direction for reforming our modern-language work, and I prophesy that, if this direction is ever largely followed, it will end in a return to the old translation method; then

we should be back where we have been for the last twenty or thirty years; I base this prophecy on an experience which I have had repeated in a number of schools. The following is a typical example. I visited recently an excellently prepared teacher of German, saw her teach, and tested her pupils in reading aloud and in conversation. Although she was, as I have said, very well prepared to do the kind of work which the state department is trying to put into effect, her pupils made a poor showing, and she quite frankly confessed that she had tried the direct method, but had felt obliged to give it up. She found, she said, that her pupils were not working, and that what they got in the classroom did not stick. She reminded me that Viëtor's famous pamphlet had as subtitle "Ein Beitrag zur Ueberbürdungsfrage," and that, while there might be a question of overwork in German schools, there never had been, and never could be, a question of overwork in American schools. On the contrary, our question always had been, and always would be, probably, how to get a fair measure of work out of our pupils. With the direct method, her pupils, she knew, were losing the advantages of good habit-formation, mental discipline, and training in English expression, which constitute the very definite and attainable results of the old method, and were not getting anything really worth while in either the ability to read intelligently or to speak the language accurately and fluently even in a limited circle of daily usage.

I have no doubt whatever that this teacher was right in her diagnosis, and I think that her case is typical; I disagree with her, however, in the remedy which she chose; she returned to the old translation method. That is not, in my opinion, the proper remedy. I believe the following statements to be absolutely true for modern-language teaching in American schools under existing conditions:

First: With the direct method pure and simple, without translation, we shall get nowhere, at least nowhere worth going.

Second: There will be little or no time for oral work (oral reading and conversation) if the daily reading-lesson is to be translated in the classroom; therefore

Third: We must banish from the classroom, but not from the course, translation into English (which can just as well be done at

home), and keep for the classroom the oral work (oral reading and conversation), which cannot be done at home.

The problem that confronts us, then, is this: how shall we assure ourselves that the translation has been done, and well done, as home preparation, without actually doing the work over in the classroom? I should like to propose the following devices, which I have long made use of in my classes.

First: When I assign a reading-lesson, and after I have developed whatever needs explanation in it, I require my pupils to do three things: (a) read the French or German aloud at home; (b) translate the lesson into English, using vocabulary and notes; and (c) study the French or German with a view to answering in the foreign language questions in French or German upon the text (content and phraseology). When I call the roll the next day, the pupils must answer either *prepared* or *unprepared* on all three things (no part-preparation is considered); I therefore put them on their honor, as the first device for securing results of home study. I do not let it go at that, however, for the simple reason that I do not wish to train boys and girls to lie, but to tell the truth.

Second: I use the following checks upon the pupil's veracity: (a) I make use of test-words, phrases, and idioms, the translation of which I ask from the pupils whom I, for any reason, suspect; and here, of course, an intimate knowledge of the pupil's character is of paramount importance; (b) I judge from the pupil's oral reading of the text (expression, intonation, grouping of words) whether he understands the text or not; (c) the pupil's answer (in the foreign language) to my questions in the foreign language based upon the text is a valuable check upon the quality of his preparation; and lastly (d) I frequently give written translation-exercises in the classroom without notice, sometimes during the last ten minutes of the hour, at other times covering an entire period, with either the same pages for translation for all pupils, or with different pages for different groups of pupils, since it is quite desirable that a pupil remember the work that he has done in the past. Indeed, I know of a German inspector who insisted that there were only three types of question in testing the work of pupils and teachers: (1) on the day's lesson—to test daily prepara-

tion; (2) on a passage chosen at random, which the pupils had done in the not too-remote past—to test thoroughness; and (3) on a passage not too far in advance—to test power.

I hate to think what would happen if we inspectors followed that method in our schools!

It is conceivable that one might object that the plan which I here propose puts all the work on the pupils and leaves nothing for the teacher to do; that objection, if it should be made, is neither just nor pertinent. In the first place, we have no *Ueberbürdungsfrage*, as I have said before; in the second place, it is the old translation method that is the line of least resistance for the teacher. She need but sit behind her desk and correct the pupil's translation; she nods and the others fall asleep. Besides, nothing that the teacher can ever do in the elementary course of a foreign language can possibly outweigh her function as a drillmaster; and the place to drill is in the classroom. In order to get time to drill she must not waste time in duplicating in the class work that can be done at home. She cannot drill her pupils by wireless, but she can make them study by wireless: by the force of her personality and the just—because uniform—strictness of her class-management. The function of the teacher as teacher, i.e., the imparting of information or the development of material for insight, should be evident just where it now is conspicuous by its absence, namely, in the assignment of lessons. Nearly all the teachers whose work I have inspected employ what I call the "fall-down-pick-me-up" method. They assign, for example, pages 22-23, and usually just when the bell for the passing of classes rings. Then, when the lesson is recited the next day, innumerable mistakes are made and carelessly corrected; that is, the pupils fall down and the teacher picks them up, only to repeat the process the next minute and every following minute. The only results of such recitations, so far as I can see, are that the pupils get into the habit of falling *gracefully* and the teacher of picking them up *patiently*—two doubtful virtues.

The place for the assignment is immediately after calling the roll. The advanced lesson should be read (in the foreign language) by the teacher—if necessary the pupils should repeat after every

sentence is read. If the pupils are well trained, chorus reading may be practiced to advantage. Difficulties in pronunciation, or unusual meanings of words, or peculiarities of diction should be noted and explained—usually in the foreign languages. Here the teacher is really teaching, and such teaching gives her the right to demand that the pupils know their lesson the next day.

After the advanced lesson has been assigned and developed, I should like to see the following features of a reading-lesson uniformly followed:

First: The day's lesson should be read in the foreign language, either by individual pupils or in chorus. I have seen classes of fifty pupils read two pages of German in chorus, all pronouncing—and pronouncing well! with proper intonation and expression—as one man. To attain such results, the teacher must have a quick ear to detect individual mistakes, and she must have rigid control of her class, to get all pupils absolutely in tact, without any levity, shirking, fooling, or incompetency, because one refractory pupil can spoil an entire class for this kind of work. By this reading the content and phraseology of the lesson is brought fresh to the pupils' minds.

Second: Translations of key-words or phrases, and explanations (in the foreign language) of work explained by the teacher the day before may well be in order now, the books still being open. Then

Third: Question- and answer-drill (in the foreign language), the books being closed. This work should be rapid and effective. No mispronunciations or wrong forms or endings should pass unnoticed, however. The teacher must get the right answer from the pupil and then sledge-hammer it into all the pupils *en masse*. The printed questions in the text should not be used for this work; that is like throwing a cold-blanket over the conversation; it becomes forced, unnatural, and besides does not really furnish aural training, since the pupils will have, in part, an eye-memory of these questions. The place for these printed questions is in the next and last feature of the daily programme, namely

Fourth: Written work. Some pupils should be sent to the board to write summaries of the work which has just been discussed orally; others, at their seats, answer in writing the printed questions

of the text. The teacher need not and should not (ordinarily) correct this paper work, though she should look it over to note the general character of the work and mark approximately. The work on the board should, however, be corrected in class, and the teacher should gauge her time accordingly. Sometimes dictation or written translation or translation from hearing might well take the place of the work under the above heading, but, at all events, it should be written work. I consider that point vital, as it is the most reliable means of controlling the other work. It "shows the pupils up" as nothing else can, and if we do not make use of it constantly we shall be training illiterates and our oral work will no longer be within the province of true education.

Having outlined the aim, the method, and some devices of the teacher's technique, I should like to say a few words about some things that I have noted in my inspection and which I should like to make the basis of warnings. The first of these is the use of the classics in the elementary course. There are still many schools reading *Wilhelm Tell*, *Minna von Barnhelm*, and *Hermann und Dorothea* in the second year. I think it much the wiser course to leave the classics for the third year, and even then not to have the whole third year taken up with them. For the second year certain well-defined principles should guide you in the choice of reading-texts. Now I do not propose to recommend textbooks, and I wish that the Committee of Twelve had not done so. For the second year the texts should be (1) narrative, rather than descriptive or dramatic (in order to afford the largest amount of conversational drill), and prose rather than poetry; (2) they should be typically German, rather than alien in characters and scenes to German life; (3) they should come within the sphere of interests of the pupils for whom they are chosen; should be rather easy, simple, imaginative, and modern.

Such general principles would exclude many of the texts now used by teachers of German and French, and, to my mind, rightly exclude them.

The second point that I wish to make is the puerility, triviality, and complete isolation from the other phases of the work shown in much of the so-called conversation in the classroom. In going

about the state nothing has so struck my attention as the idea of teachers that modern-language instruction is composed of water-tight, air-tight compartments, such as: (1) grammar, (a) forms, (b) syntax; (2) translation, (a) into English, (b) from English; (3) conversation. Almost invariably they arrange their weekly lesson-plan for the second year as follows: reading and translation, three days a week; grammar, two days; conversation, the last five or ten minutes of every reading-lesson, or a separate day is assigned for it, thus leaving two days for reading and translation. Time and again I have visited schools, only to have the teacher tell me: This is our grammar day; or, This is our translation day. Then, since it is my business to find out what I can about the teacher's oral work, I ask her if she can have some conversation. Yes, she is quite willing. And then something like the following takes place.

*Teacher:* "Was hast du heute morgen gegessen?"

*Pupil:* "Ich habe gegessen Milch und Brot und Schredded Wheat."

The teacher corrects the word order, but she has to leave the shredded wheat, because no one knows what that is in German. Then a few more questions are asked, such as, "Was siehst du aus dem Fenster?" or, "Was habe ich in der Hand?" I have two serious objections to this kind of conversation: in the first place, it is isolated, absolutely severed from all relation either to the reading or to grammatical instruction; in the second place, it is regarded by the pupils as a kind of play; it is not serious; it is amusement, pure and simple. You can easily see that, thus disconnected, it lacks naturalness, spontaneity; it is lugged in by the horns.

When I ask the teachers if they have no conversation based upon the text, they answer readily in the affirmative. I should like to hear some of that, I say. Then—a sad result of our last examination, perhaps—they say to their pupils: "Steigern Sie gern," "Konjugieren Sie mögen im Präsens des Konjunktivs," etc., or, "Was ist die Syntax von gehen in diesem Satz?"

Now I am not here, or anywhere, to make fun of things, but to try to have teachers get a certain point of view. The kinds of

questions that I have just noted would be all right if they were a direct and immediate outcome of the study of the text, where alone they have their *raison d'être*, where they have all the elements of naturalness and spontaneity. The time to ask for the present tense of *mögen*, subjunctive mood, is when a pupil has used the wrong form in his answer to a certain question. The time to ask what a pupil has eaten for breakfast or for dinner is when someone eats breakfast or dinner in the text which is being read; the time to talk about the trees and hills which one sees from the window of the schoolroom is when, in the text, it is a question of the landscape.

Let me illustrate. Suppose that our text is *Immensee*. The very first page gives a half-dozen different topics for discussion, all of which should be completed by the teacher. Among these topics are: (1) the weather and the seasons: *es ist ein Sommernachmittag, oder Nachmittag im Herbst*; the time of day comes in naturally, in addition to *Sonnenuntergang*, which suggests *Sonnenaufgang*, with drill on the verbs *aufgehen* and *untergehen*. If this kind of *lebendige Grammatik* is made use of, teachers and pupils will not say, as was actually said in one class which I visited in the northern part of the state: "Ich gehe auf, du gehst auf, er geht auf," etc.

In the second place, elementary ideas of the geography of Germany may be attained, if, as there should be, there is a map of Germany in the room. We are told that the old man spoke "mit einem etwas südlichen Akzent." Pupils can be told about some general differences between the North and South German speech, such as the detestable South German bilabial *w*, the tendency to make all stops into spirants and all spirants into stops, so that *gehen* sounds like *kehen* and *kehren* sounds like *gehren*, and such a simple word as *guchen* is written with both *g* and *k*. Things of such a nature brought up and riveted onto the reading lesson will never be forgotten, simply because they are taught in accordance with well-known psychological laws; they alone give life and interest to otherwise dead facts.

In the third place, there is a description of a typical *alt-deutsches* house, the house-door, with its *Guckfenster*, the vestibule, the stairs, the *alte Haushälterin*, the study-room of Reinhardt, with its book-shelves and vases, the center table and *Lehnstuhl*,

the pictures on the wall, etc. How easy to bring into this scene the different rooms, *Küche*, *Wohnzimmer*, *Schlafzimmer*, *Stube und Kammer*, everything except the *Badezimmer*; and that can be introduced in contrasting such a house with a home in America.

This is merely an illustration, taken from one page of *Immensee*; it will serve for almost any good text. Every phase of life, from the games of children to the professions of men, even to the collection of folk-songs as a hobby, can be illustrated from *Immensee*; from the building of a house, the making of a bench, the composition of fairy tales, the life of a university student, the occupations of a gentleman-farmer, walking, running, swimming, flowers, including water-lilies, even symbolism, etc., *ad infinitum*: everything is there, if the teacher only has (1) a little imagination, (2) a little versatility, (3) a little knowledge of German language and life. And of course the same thing is true of many French texts.

Of course there must be some control of this oral work, if the pupils are to spell their words correctly. What I always have done, practically ever since I began teaching, is to make large use of the mimeograph. Such connected vocabularies can be run off on the mimeograph in a very short time and given to the pupils for review at home. There is no book that contains them in a satisfactory manner. Many such books have been written, but they are not connected with real literature, and hence are mere word-lists, dry as dust, and *geisttötend*, or they are embodied in insipid, wooden dialogues, which the pupils read first, thus getting first an eye-memory rather than an ear-memory and therefore defeating their chief aim. Personally I have no patience with these wooden dialogue-books;—wherever they are in use, the only thing that is ever done with them is to read them, with perhaps a little brute-memorizing of parts of them. The very essence of conversation and of the oral method is the unexpected, the spontaneous: the hearing of words and sentences which have not been seen and learned beforehand in the form in which they are used.

Now what about grammar? Teachers say sometimes: I cannot do that kind of work because the Regents lay so much stress upon grammar (or it may be translation). Either statement is absolutely without foundation. Teachers make them either

because they have not tried this method, or because they are incapable of following it. The method presupposes either a thoroughly independent command of the language, or very serious preparation, on the part of the teacher, of every lesson. When I first began to teach, I used to think out, or write out, fifty or seventy-five questions on the text, designed to bring out the form and content of the lesson to be read. I say form and content, because the form is important. I do not mean here questions of style, but merely sentence-structure and phraseology. A large part of my questions are grammar questions, that is, not the type mentioned above, "Steigern Sie," "Konjugieren Sie," etc., of simple forms, but their use in complete sentences. But the chief value of the conversational method in teaching grammar is the pupil's application of grammar in his answers. He uses the wrong case after a preposition: the teacher must get the right form out of him in the first place, and then pound in that knowledge for the whole class by the rapid use, with objects if convenient, of a half-dozen illustrations. Thus the pupil's vague, hazy, theoretic grammar-knowledge passes over into actual use until it becomes, at least in certain forms and expressions, automatic.

I suppose that some teachers will say that I am offending against my own test of a good aim by expecting too much of the average teacher, especially in the smaller schools. It is true, there are very many teachers of French and German who are lamentably deficient in scholarship and pedagogic technique, but the work here proposed is not for that reason impracticable. I know that many of these teachers are now eagerly reading books on method, are planning to take summer courses, or to go abroad for the vacation, or longer. Within a few years, no doubt, the general level of modern-language teaching in the state will be very appreciably raised. There are only a few, a very few, teachers who are beyond hope: those who have grown gray in the old method and whose speech-organs, in so far as possibility of change is concerned, are already affected with *rigor mortis*. They deserve all honor from you and from me, but they will, and they should, stick to the old translation method and not try to pour new wine into old bottles.